

AP Language and Composition  
*Flannery O'Connor: Spiritual Writings*

These questions

Welcome to AP Lang! One purpose of these study questions is to help you to acclimate to the technical terms of academic writing and rhetoric, as AP Lang is a primarily a class in these topics/skills. Make a note of terms I use that you are not familiar with, so that we can discuss them in September. You should read all the questions, even though you are not required to answer them all. Doing so will help you also orient yourself within the text.

You are not required to write anything over the summer. In September I will ask you to answer one question from each section (delineated by the line of asterisks) in a paragraph of at least 5-6 sentences including at least two blended and cited (in MLA style) quotations from the text. Thus, in total, you will answer 8 questions to complete this assignment. Copy out the question at the top of your paragraph to help you focus on it in your answer, which should begin with a topic sentence that serves as a thesis for your paragraph. Time will be allotted in September for this assignment—again, you needn't start on these unless you have the time and inclination to do so.

(As with all written work, typed or handwritten, please double space. While “study questions” suggests a process piece, please take the assignment seriously, writing carefully, fully, and well.)

For now, you may avoid the essay prompts (marked \*\*\*) or you may answer such questions in a single paragraph, which can serve as “starter” for an essay you will go on to write later, a week or two into the first quarter.

**Flannery O'Connor**

**O'Connor is a major figure of American literature, writing in the mid-20th century. Her work is often shocking, bold, and brash, in order to convey her messages, which are clearly Catholic. She speaks in the language of her time and place, so you will encounter in this text inflammatory language that will feel classist and racist. O'Connor's characters are often negative examples of the truths the stories convey. Read along and follow her sometimes ugly characters discover important and beautiful truths about humanity, God, and the nature of revelation.**

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Sources

Why put the sources in the front of the book? What rhetorical purpose is achieved through the placement? (It would be academically acceptable to list them in the back, like a works cited page or a bibliography.)

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Preface

1. The first sentence of the preface offers us a first-person speaker. How does this speaker establish his ethos? What is that speaker like?

2. Academics in composition talk about gestures in texts that either invite people in or push people out. One of the purposes of a preface is to invite the reader in. Find two or three places where the prose feels especially inviting. List them.

3. Are there places where diction or syntax has the effect of pushing you out of the text, making you feel excluded as a reader? Does the writer ever seem to make assumptions about what you have read or know about O'Connor?

4. "One doesn't *join* the Catholic Church; one becomes a Catholic." Explain.

5. What is the effect of Ellsberg's bringing in Sally Fitzgerald?

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### Introduction

1. The introduction begins with an epigraph. What does it suggest about the essay that follows? What does it add?

2. How does Giannone establish O'Connor's ethos?

3. Giannone argues that O'Connor is a theologian (beginning p. 16). What evidence does he have to support his point?

4. What is wrong with mainstream Catholicism at mid-century, according to the essay? (17).

5. Why, according to Giannone (who argues and cites O'Connor), does O'Connor use violence in her stories?

6. Giannone appeals to the 21st-century audience by mentioning 9/11. How does this appeal to kairos operate? Do you find it effective? Why or why not?

7. What is the rhetorical purpose of the overview of O'Connor's biography, beginning on p. 20?

8. In fashion in the mid-twentieth century is New Criticism. Familiarize yourself briefly with this school of criticism. Write a 100-word summary of your findings. Cite credible source(s).

9. Discuss, using evidence from the introduction, the impact on her writing of O'Connor's contracting lupus.

10. How is O'Connor a "one-woman *aggiornamento*"? (31). (Also, what's up with the Italian in this passage? To what is it an allusion?)

11. Giannone offers, "In training us how to see, O'Connor teaches us how to be realists" (36). Contextualize this passage in the introduction; what do you infer Giannone means by this statement?

12. On pages 36-37, Giannone suggests that O'Connor's work is very conscious of evil. Explain Giannone's idea and O'Connor's approach to spiritual warfare.

13. In what way is it that "faith hurts"? (38).

14. What is the role of self-scrutiny and to what does it lead? (39).

15. "Fiction is the concrete expression of a mystery—mystery that is lived" (44). What does this statement mean, and how does it play out?

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### 1: Christian Realism

1. Consider the epigraph. What do you suppose O'Connor means by "hillbilly Thomist"?

2. What is a Christian Realist, according to the chapter?

### The Universe of Faith

3. Consider the different texts excerpted for "The Universe of Faith." How do they speak to each other? What theme (message) emerges? How do the excerpts argue for the theme?

\*\*\*4. How does O'Connor regard her audience? How do considerations of audience influence her writing? Include in your answer both what O'Connor says in her nonfiction and your observations from the excerpt from *Wise Blood*.

5. Look up Simone Weil and Edith Stein in a credible source. What do their examples/stories and ideas add to your understanding of O'Connor's theology?

### Truth and Love

\*\*\*6. How does O'Connor refute A's idea that O'Connor is a "fascist"? Identify O'Connor's argument and explain the strategies you see, evaluating also their effectiveness.

### Comic and Terrible

7. How does O'Connor regard Simone Weil? If you did not do so for question #5, look her up now and see if you can understand on what O'Connor bases her idea.

### The Light of Christian Faith

8. Consider the further reflections of O'Connor on her relationship to her audience. Revise here your answer to question #4 in light of ideas from her letter to John Hawkes.

### An Unbelieving Age

9. Explain the epigraph. What does it add to the section?

10. According to O'Connor, what is the problem with modernism?
11. What are the three types of modern man, according to O'Connor? How does this information fit into her overall argument in this section?
12. What is O'Connor's main argument from p. 71 to the end of the section? Isolate (or construct) her thesis. How does she support it? Is the argument convincing?

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## 2: Mother and Teacher

1. Who is the "mother and teacher" the chapter title refers to?
2. Look up in a credible source two of the following: Romano Guardini, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Baron von Hügel, Cardinal Newman. How might these writers be especially influential to O'Connor?

### The Body of Christ

3. The famous story about Mary McCarthy (a fashionable writer of her day) and O'Connor sheds important light on O'Connor's worldview (76). How does the reality of transubstantiation support ideas earlier in the text about Christian Realism, and how does it influence O'Connor's fiction? Choose either your assigned story or any of the excerpts you encounter in this book to discuss what you see here.
4. Look up in a credible source the Beat writers (if you need a name, begin with Allen Ginsburg, Jack Kerouac). In what relevant ways does their worldview differ from O'Connor's?
5. What is the argument made and/or supported by the inclusion of the excerpt of *Wise Blood* pp. 79–80?

### Sins of the Church

6. What can you infer about the state of American Catholicism in the 1950s, according to the first two excerpts in the section?
7. "To expect too much is to have a sentimental view of life and this is a softness that ends in bitterness. Charity is hard and endures" (83). Paraphrase this idea and explain it.
- \*\*\*8. O'Connor writes that the Church "tries to get along with any form of government that does not set itself up as a religion" (86). Here, O'Connor is referring to Communism. Still, it is a common religious-conservative criticism of progressive policies (government programs such as "Medicare for All") that our government, too, in ways sets itself up as a religion. Do enough research to understand this position and discuss whether you think it is a valid argument that "big government" sets itself up as a religion. Further, if this argument is valid, what is the harm of a government as religion?

Faith and Mystery

\*\*\*9. O'Connor writes, "For me a dogma is only a gateway to contemplation and is an instrument of freedom and not of restriction" (87). In your own life, have you found this to be the case? Take a stand and use evidence from your life and/or reading to support your idea.

10. Examine the tone in the story "The Enduring Chill" as excerpted pp. 87–89. As a reader, with which character(s) do your sympathies lie?

11. O'Connor tells Cecil Dawkins that he sees the Church "from the standpoint of...ethical sociology" (91). What is wrong, according to O'Connor, with this view?

12. O'Connor makes up a situation of a young girl asking about evolution while Père Teilhard discovers Peking man. Explain this synecdoche: First, how is it a synecdoche? Second, how does she use this synecdoche to support her argument?

\*\*\*13. In the letter(s) to the Emory student, identify O'Connor's main argument. Then, explain how she supports what she has to say. (Be clear about whether you are handling one or both excerpts to Alfred Corn.)

The Church and the Novelist

14. Explain O'Connor's differentiation of the Catholic novelist and the Christian novelist. Then, make inferences about why O'Connor expresses theological truth through novels, rather than through philosophical treatises or another, more direct genre.

15. "The tensions of being a Catholic novelist are probably never balanced for the writer until the Church becomes so much a part of his personality that he can forget about her—in the same sense that when he writes, he forgets about himself" (98).

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3: Revelation

\*\*\*Read the Flannery O'Connor story "Revelation." Write an essay that analyzes her use of one rhetorical technique: dramatic irony. Your first paragraph should include a synopsis (author, title, summary, any other context needed for reader) and a thesis about the writer's purpose, which could be the moral of the story (the writer's theme and message about that theme). The body paragraphs will identify, with quotes, where dramatic irony is used: when a character sees herself, her situation, or those around her differently than the reader is meant to. Then point out the effect of the dramatic irony (humorous? poignant? etc.) and explain how that effect supports the writer's knowable purpose.

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4: A Reason to Write

1. O'Connor offers: "I feel that if I were not a Catholic, I would have no reason to write, no reason to see, no reason ever to feel horrified or even to enjoy anything" (125). What aspects of

Catholicism or view of Catholicism is O'Connor offering in this passage? Provide evidence from the section to support your idea.

The Catholic Writer

2. How does Catholicism free the writer, according to O'Connor?
3. Why does O'Connor not write for a wider audience, as her mother suggests?

Territory Held by the Devil

4. "Even if he writes about he characters who are mostly unfree, it is the sudden free action, the open possibility, which he knows is the only thing capable of illuminating the picture and giving it life... [I]t is the free act, the acceptance of grace particularly, that I always have my eye on as the thing which will make the story work..." (127). How does this idea play out in "Revelation"?
5. According to O'Connor's ideas in this section, in what way is her fiction moral?
6. The St. Cyril passage about the dragon (63) is the original epigraph to the story. To what in the story does the dragon refer? What are the implications of the connection?
7. Explain the story's key passage, providing understanding of it through a SOAPSTone analysis. "She would of been a good woman," The Misfit said, "if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life."

Moments of Grace

8. Using one or more texts you have studied in 9th or 10th grade, support, refute, or qualify the following assertion: "[A]ll good stories are about conversion, about a character's changing" (135).
10. "The devil's greatest wile, Baudelaire has said, is to convince us that he does not exist" (137). Using examples from your reading and/or your experience, support, refute, or qualify the above statement.
11. Explore, in the excerpt from *Wise Blood*, the symbolism of blindness (139-140) and its effect on this part of the story.

Eyes to See

12. What kind of reader/critic does O'Connor hope to find for her work?
13. What, according to O'Connor, is the role of free will in *Wise Blood*?

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## 5: The Province of Joy

1. What is “passive diminishment”? What are O’Connor’s personal and professional relationships to this idea?

### The Death of a Child

\*\*\*2. Write a rhetorical analysis of O’Connor’s introduction to the biography of Mary Ann. What does O’Connor argue in the essay, and what techniques does she use to support her idea? If you focus on the appeals, please do not write an ethos-logos-pathos paper, for reasons we have discussed.

### The Cost of Faith

3. Explain the phrase “naive purity.” How is it an oxymoron?

4. What is the knowable purpose of O’Connor’s anecdote about Robert Bridges (a poet and translator) and Gerard Manley Hopkins (a famous poet and priest; you might have learned or heard “The Wind Hover”)? (152, 159). What does the anecdote add to O’Connor’s overall argument in the letter to William Sessions?

5. “What people don’t realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is an electric blanket, when of course it is the cross” (153). Use evidence from your own reading (Bonhoeffer, if you know him), from religion class, or from your own experience to support, refute, or qualify this assertion.

\*\*\*6. In O’Connor’s response to A’s leaving the Church, what is O’Connor’s main argument and how does she support it? Do a rhetorical analysis of the relevant passages pp. 156–158. Again, it is very rarely a good idea to write an ethos-pathos-logos essay.

\*\*\*7. Conduct a rhetorical analysis of O’Connor’s letter to Alfred Corn (159–161). You may find it useful to compare and contrast her earlier writing to Corn (93–95) to identify the way her strategies of persuasion have changed to suit her purpose. What is her main argument, and how does she support it?

### Passive Diminishment

8. Why does O’Connor respond as she does to the lady in Davison’s? What is the tone of the excerpt, and the overall emotional effect of the anecdote? (163).

9. How does O’Connor in this section regard suffering? Do you agree? What do these ideas bring to bear on our culture’s contemporary debate about euthanasia/assisted suicide?

### The Will of God

\*\*\*10. How does the story as a whole prepare the reader for the last sentence of “The Temple of the Holy Ghost”? Consider imagery and point of view (or tone) in addition to the plot (progression) of the story. Quote sparingly from O’Connor’s commentary after the story; use mostly the story to support your ideas.